



LEGACY LEDGER

THE OFFICIAL MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER OF LEGACY NAFC ALUMNI



Art has the power to
transform, to
illuminate, to educate,
inspire and motivate
HARVEY FIERSTEIN

A Message from the NAFC Education Foundation Alumni Coordinator, Sherri McKeen

This month, we celebrate not only the start of a new year but also some remarkable accomplishments from our alumni community. We're spotlighting NAFC graduates who have made their mark as talented artists, showcasing their creativity and passion. These stories remind us of the incredible legacies that begin in our classrooms and extend far beyond.

We're also celebrating an astounding \$127,000 raised through the 2024 Royal Court campaign! This achievement more than doubles last year's total and speaks volumes about the generosity and dedication of our alumni and supporters.

Finally, we're gearing up for a special milestone: the 20th anniversary of the NAFC Education Foundation. Join us on February 21 at Huber's Plantation Hall for an evening of celebration, gratitude, and fun as we honor our community and the impact we've made together over two decades.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Amanda Beam, Guest Contributor

“Art is not a thing; it is a way,” said American artist Elbert Hubbard.

Our two Legacy spotlights this week validate Hubbard’s adage. Early in their youth, both knew they were artists. Their passions for these pursuits would not end with their school lessons, but sustain their working lives, as well.

For Juan Dontrese Brown (NAHS ’91), his creative trek led him to the world of graphic design. The skills he discovered in its learning helped to transform him into the innovator, activist and influencer he remains today.

Since the age of 19, Carrie Johns (FCHS ’99) has painted colorful murals across barren, sometimes aged walls. Her art tells stories, taking everyday onlookers on voyages of joy and whimsy.

As both continue on the artists’ way, we are lucky to experience their creations.

Juan Dontrese Brown (NAHS ‘91): More than just graphic design on this leader’s palette

Graphic design didn’t really seem like art when Juan Dontrese Brown first heard of it as a Georgetown College Sophomore.

When painting or sculpting, or developing film, you get your hands dirty. Using a computer to do all the work seemed like cheating, he thought.

But then the chair of his college’s art department brought in a guest speaker to talk about motion graphics.

“I was hooked,” said Juan Dontrese, who would not only help to create Georgetown College’s graphic design curriculum, but be the first to graduate there with it as his major. He later returned as a professor and transformed its graphic design program into one of the best in the region.

“It’s a different medium,” the storyteller, leader and renowned speaker said about graphic design, “but you’re still using all the principles and elements of design and form. You’re just using it from a computer aided standpoint.”



Art always gave the 1991 New Albany High School graduate an outlet. Even before he moved from Louisville and started attending Scribner Middle School in seventh grade, he doodled and drew. Back then, he knew his future would include this act of creating, but he could never have predicted where the artist's journey would take him.

His transfer to New Albany, like a signpost, helped point the way. While Juan Dontrese's mother instilled in him the value of education early on, it was those who surrounded him at NAHS that shifted his mindset. The majority of these friends spoke of attending college as if no other options existed.

And so, Juan Dontrese wanted to further his education, as well. In high school, the burgeoning abstract painter took fine art classes, French, and dreamed of becoming an international artist.

But it was athletics that would provide opportunities for turning his college hopes into reality.

Sports came easy to the natural athlete. He started out playing basketball and running track. Jim Kaczmarek, the NAHS football coach at the time, tried and tried again to recruit Juan Dontrese to play under the Friday night lights, but the teenager's mom just wasn't having it.

"So, Coach Kaczmarek comes in my house one day, and he has every piece of equipment, even equipment that I wouldn't wear. And he's like, 'Here's how I'm going to protect your son'," the 2022 NAHS Hall of Fame inductee said. "And (my mom) says, 'Okay, if my son gets hurt, I'm coming for you.' And that was it."

This was his junior year. Two years later, he'd be attending Georgetown College on a football scholarship.

Following his 1996 college graduation with a degree in Graphic Design, Juan Dontrese started his own business. A few years later, he enrolled in Morehead State University, where he also helped coached football. He earned his MA in Graphic Design from the university in 1998. Later, he also received a Master of Fine Arts from the Savannah College of Art & Design.

Yet design is just the tip of the paint brush for Juan Dontrese. In 2005, he transitioned from his position as an arts professor to becoming a creative director for corporations such as Victorinox Swiss Army and Capital One. A little over a decade later, he founded his own graphic design firm called BrownBaylor. And, during the Covid years, he helped start Hidden in Plain Sight, a web-based VR initiative in Richmond, VA that highlights often overlooked historical sites in a more inclusive way.

"Being in the city of Richmond, the former capital of the Confederacy, there are a lot of sites within our city that folks walk by every day not knowing the historical context from a Black American experience standpoint," the 52-year-old said. "Hidden in Plain Sight is changing the future of cultural education, allowing any historically underrepresented group to have a platform to share their narratives and their stories from their voices."

Add in all the community health, economic mobility and educational work he's done, and you'll see why Juan was recently made an inductee into the 2025 Morehead State University Alumni Hall of Fame.

"I'm doing what I am supposed to do because of those that have mentored, guided me and helped me along the way," he said. "Having these individuals be able to mentor and put in me all the love and effort to provide opportunities for me is something that they gave me, so now it's my responsibility to give that gift back. That's why I do what I do."

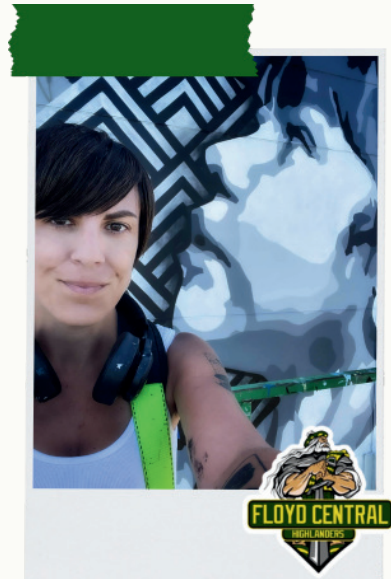
Carrie Johns (FCHS '99): Making it big with mural paintings and other art

Towering brick walls. Oversized bourbon bottles. Horse statues. Etch A Sketches.

Through her art, Carrie Johns tells stories in transformative, albeit not always traditional, ways.

Take for instance her newest completed mural painted on New Albany's two-story Token Club. On the outer edges of a Hokusai-like wave, an owl flies and, nearby, a beaver rests, while a green fish flops from within the blue. In the middle, the rays of an orange sun outstretch as a canoer paddles toward it. To their side, a skateboarder rides a striped aquamarine bow.

Like in life, everything is connected.



Many museums have you pay to view paintings like this. But those who pass on this city's streets can experience Carrie's nearly dozen different murals free of charge. And that number doesn't count the others she's completed in Corydon, Clarksville and other Southern Indiana locations.

"My favorite thing about getting to paint murals, not only is it satisfying for me as a person and for my career, but getting to talk to people who aren't used to seeing stuff like that," the 1999 Floyd Central High School graduate said. "A lot of people see the finished product, but they don't get to see the work in progress. And I think that that's really interesting for people."

From an early age, Carrie knew art was something she'd always do. Her father, who painted in his free time, helped nourish her talent. Never critical, he offered her tips, and encouraged her to consider art as a profession.

But materials for the budding artist could be expensive. Carrie looked for other mediums to express her creativity. Enter the generationally beloved Etch A Sketch. Refining her craft through the decades, the New Albany resident still designs intricate drawings on the devices. Her projects included DaVinci's "Last Supper", Escher's "Drawing Hands" and even realistic sketches of pop culture icons. An elaborate preservation process helps her save the artwork from being erased.

"That's why I started using the Etch A Sketch... I could just do all the drawings I wanted to on it over and over again," said Carrie.

When asked what advice she'd give to kids interested in art, she continued, "Don't get caught up on what you're using, or having the nicest stuff. Just do it. Even if you're just drawing in the snow. As long as you're still doing it, things will fall into place."

As Carrie grew, so did her talent. When she mastered the highest-level art classes at FCHS, her teacher Don Calfee allowed her the freedom to construct her own curriculum. His encouragement and advocacy also helped her enter local art contests, as well as present her portfolio to art school representatives.

After graduating from high school, Carrie spent one year studying fine arts at Indiana University Southeast before transferring to the University of Louisville. Not necessarily wanting to specialize in a certain medium, she opted to earn a BA in art history.

At first, Carrie used her many talents to construct exhibits and other signage for a local architectural design company. Following marriage and children, she chose to become a stay-at-home mom, but still continued to create art. Among other projects, she painted horse statues for Gallopalooza, nursery wall murals for expecting parents, and custom architectural portraits for homeowners.

And when the kids entered school, she decided to try for a fulltime career in art.

"I was like, okay, I'm going to figure out this art thing. I'm going to take a year, and if it's not successful, if it isn't fruitful, then I'll try to find a fulltime job somewhere," Carrie said. "And I ended up being really good. I just put my name out there and accepted every job that I could."

Now, Carrie has her own studio in downtown New Albany. In addition to her murals and commissioned pieces, the 44-year-old currently has her work shown in several exhibitions.

"So, I'm just like, how did I get here?" Carrie said. "I feel so lucky like that I get to do what I love for a living. How many people get to say that?"



Carrie's mural on New Albany's two-story Token Club.

For those interested in Carrie's work, you may contact her through her [Carrie Johns Art Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#) pages.

Record-Breaking Success for the 2024 Legacy NAFC Royal Court!



The 2024 Legacy NAFC Royal Court candidates from left to right: Todd Carter (FC '88), Missy Hillock (FC '97), Lindsay Coffman (FC '02), Brad Curry (FC '75), Matt Brown (NA '95), Kristen Boehnlein (NA '94), Dayna Ashley (NA '88) and Todd Brito (NA '01).

The 2024 Legacy NAFC Royal Court campaign wrapped up in spectacular fashion, and what a journey it has been! Eight remarkable NAFC alumni joined forces to compete in a friendly (and fiercely inspiring) competition to raise funds for the NAFC Education Foundation.

Over the course of the campaign, these eight inspiring alumni tapped into their networks, rallied their supporters, and showcased their dedication to NAFC Schools. The result? An incredible, record-smashing \$127,000 raised to support innovative classroom grants, mental health initiatives, student field trips, and so much more.

On the evening of the Royal Court event, as donations continued to roll in, we celebrated Kristen Boehnlein as the top fundraiser of the night. Following our routine post-event audit, we are thrilled to announce that both Kristen and Matt Brown achieved record-breaking fundraising totals—with Matt narrowly surpassing Kristen in the final tally!

To commemorate this incredible accomplishment, we crowned Matt this past Friday at halftime of the New Albany vs. Silver Creek boys' basketball game. Together, they represent our two record-setting Royal Court champions for 2024! A heartfelt thank you to Kristen, Matt, and the entire Royal Court team for your hard work, dedication, and unwavering support.

Every dollar raised by the Royal Court candidates represents an investment in our students and teachers, empowering them to dream big and achieve even more. The NAFC Education Foundation is beyond grateful to our candidates, our sponsors, and everyone who contributed to this record-breaking effort.

We couldn't be prouder of this year's Royal Court and the legacy they've left behind. To every donor, supporter, and sponsor: thank you for making this year's campaign unforgettable.

Special Thanks to our 2024 Royal Court Sponsors

CROWNING SPONSORS



ROYAL SPONSORS



JOIN US ON FACEBOOK!

Stay updated on your Floyd County classmates, discover thrilling events in your NAFC school community, and learn firsthand about the NAFC Education Foundation by connecting with us at facebook.com/LegacyNAFCAlumni.

**HUBER'S PLANTATION HALL
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 21ST**



Education CELEBRATION **2025 GALA**

**Celebrating 20 Years of
Supporting Students,
Empowering Educators,
and Inspiring Success**



Join Us for a Special 20th Anniversary Celebration!

We are thrilled to invite you to the New Albany Floyd County Education Foundation's most extraordinary annual gala yet—**The Education Celebration!** This year marks 20 incredible years of supporting students, empowering educators, and inspiring success in NAFC Schools.

Join us on **Friday, February 21, 2025, at 5:30 PM at Huber's Plantation Hall** as we commemorate two decades of impact, innovation, and inspiration. Together, we'll celebrate the transformative work of the NAFC Education Foundation and the community that has made it all possible.

This milestone evening will feature:

- A robust silent and live auction
- Live entertainment by the Juice Box Heroes
- A Dream Vacation Raffle
- A delicious dinner
- Special tributes to our founding leaders and the Foundation's growth and impact

Why This Event Matters:

Since 2005, the NAFC Education Foundation has proudly donated over \$5 million to empower educators, enrich students' lives, and fund innovative learning opportunities—all without relying on tax revenue. Programs like Great Classroom Grants, Mental Health Initiatives, Blessings in a Backpack, and the Dolly Parton Imagination Library are just a few ways your support creates lasting change.

Education is and always will be a cornerstone of our community. Together, we can continue building bright futures for the students and teachers who make our NAFC School community extraordinary.

For tickets, sponsorships, and more information, visit onecau.se/educationcelebration25.

Thank you for your unwavering support of public education and our schools. Help us make this 20th-anniversary celebration an unforgettable evening!



WANT TO CHECK OUT PAST EDITIONS OF THE LEGACY LEDGER?

Visit our [Alumni Newsroom!](#)



The New Albany Floyd County Education Foundation is a not-for-profit organization that works in conjunction with NAFC Schools to provide privately funded supplemental resources and programs to students, teachers, and schools. Legacy NAFC is the official alumni support group of the NAFC Education Foundation and New Albany Floyd County Schools.

When alumni donate to the New Albany Floyd County Education Foundation, you are investing in the success of all NAFCs students and educators. Alumni donors become Legacy NAFC members through an annual donation.

Make your impact today and become a Legacy NAFC Alumni Member!

For more information, contact Sherri McKeen at smckeen@nafcs.org or 812-542-2242 at the NAFC Education Foundation.

www.NAFCEdFoundation.org/alumni



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